



OKLAHOMA
COMMISSION ON
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program

FY2020 | ANNUAL REPORT

CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS (CIP) INITIATIVES

The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) is dedicated to serving and improving the lives of children of incarcerated parents through effective planning and service coordination with partners across the state. Over the years, OCCY and partners have aimed to accomplish this goal by establishing, coordinating and/or convening the following CIP initiatives:

1. Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program
2. Oklahoma Children of Incarcerated Parents Advisory Committee
3. Educational Toolkit and Resource Clearinghouse
4. Continuing Professional Education and Training
5. Data Collection and Research

OKLAHOMA MENTORING CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS PROGRAM

In accordance with Title 10A 2-10-101 and Title 10A 2-10-102, OCCY is charged to annually issue a request for proposal to establish one-to-one mentoring for children whose parents are incarcerated or youth who are at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. The purpose of the program is to provide effective intervention services through one-to-one mentoring relationships to children of incarcerated parents who are either currently placed outside the home or have been identified by the Office of Juvenile Affairs as at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. Entities eligible to submit applications to administer to the program are limited to non-profit organizations.

OCCY awarded non-profit organization Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oklahoma (BBBSOK) \$55,000 to provide one-to-one mentoring to children of incarcerated parents for state fiscal year 2020 (FY2020). Those funds allowed BBBSOK to provide 37 children with a personal adult mentor, committed to meeting with them on a consistent and regular basis for at least one year. OCCY has provided program funding to BBBSOK since July 1, 2015. Since that time, BBBSOK has matched 224 children of incarcerated parents with a caring mentor. The goal of BBBSOK is to change the child's life for the better – forever.



THE MISSION OF BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF OKLAHOMA

The mission of BBBSOK is to create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth. The goal of Big Brothers Big Sisters has remained the same for over a century – to match one caring, stable, and positive adult role model with one at-risk or high-risk child. Matches are made based on common interests and personalities, child needs, and volunteer abilities. BBBSOK requires at least one-year of involvement in the program. The result is a child who experiences the consistency and positive influence of a one-to-one relationship with a supportive adult.

“The goal of Big Brothers Big Sisters has remained the same for over a century – to match one caring, stable, and positive adult role model with one at-risk or high-risk child.”



HOW A MATCH IS MADE AT BBBSOK



BBBSOK MATCH COSTS INCLUDE:

- In-person or video interviews with volunteer, child, and their parent/guardian
- Extensive background check for volunteers
- Staff salary for client assessments, match profiling, match introduction, and monthly match support conversations

TAKE THE ACEs TEST

Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Were your parents ever separated or divorced?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Was your mother or stepmother... Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Did a household member go to prison?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Oklahoma ranks 45th in the nation for children impacted by ACEs, with 20% of Oklahoma children under the age of 17 saying "yes" to at least two of the questions above.ⁱⁱ All children supported by OCCY funds answered "yes" to the final question.

THE PROBLEM: ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES IN OKLAHOMA

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are categorized into three groups: abuse (emotional, physical and sexual), neglect (emotional and physical), and household challenges (incarcerated parent, mother treated violently, substance abuse or mental illness in the household or parental separation or divorce). Exposure to ACEs can cause prolonged toxic stress, which can lead to a higher risk of learning and behavioral issues, obesity, heart disease, alcoholism, and drug use.ⁱ

Oklahoma ACEs Statistics:

- Oklahoma has the highest incarceration rate in the worldⁱⁱⁱ
- 15% (or 135,000) of Oklahoma's children have experienced parental incarceration^{iv}
- 35% live in single-parent families^v

MENTORING TO COMBAT THE IMPACT OF ACEs ON OKLAHOMA'S YOUTH AT BBBSOK

Researchers at Harvard posed the question, "when confronted with the fallout of childhood trauma, why do some children adapt and overcome, while others bear lifelong scars that flatten their potential?" Their answer points to mentorship: Every child who winds up doing well has had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult.^{vi} The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention specifically names the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring as a program providing services that counteract the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences.^{vii}

MENTORING DURING COVID-19 AT BBBSOK

The core of BBBSOK's program is the face-to-face relationship-building between Bigs and Littles. When COVID-19 reached Oklahoma, they swiftly adjusted every aspect of their program to allow for virtual alternatives. BBBS of America has been fully supportive in these efforts, modernizing procedures to allow these changes while still maintaining their vigilance for child safety and strong relationship building.

On March 16, 2020, BBBSOK staff began working from home, all matches were asked to cease in-person contact and migrate to virtual interactions. Client Interviews were also conducted virtually. The introduction of new matches were suspended until May 15, 2020. At that point, there were many unknowns around COVID-19, and the organization wanted to do their part to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus. Program services have since resumed as best as possible, while following CDC guidelines for in-person interactions.

OUTCOME DATA FOR OCCY-FUNDED MATCHES

Through singular moments of positive impact one child at a time, Littles overcome shyness and self-doubt, build trusting relationships with peers, and improve their academic performance. BBBSOK utilizes instruments developed by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America to monitor program effectiveness. These are the Child and Youth Outcomes Surveys (COS and YOS) and the Strength of Relationship (SOR) survey.

The SOR gauges the relationship between the Big and Little, measuring outcomes like connectedness, safety, the importance of the match relationship, and the child's feelings about his or her volunteer Big. The COS and YOS are performance outcome measurement tools that are administered in a pre-test/post-test format. The COS is given to children ages 10 and younger and the YOS is given to children 11 and older at match introduction and annually at the match anniversary. The COS and YOS are a direct measurement of academics, relationships, and risk behavior. BBBSOK Staff assess the child's positive outcomes through the survey responses.

In addition to these annual evaluation tools, their program specialists collect anecdotal data and are trained to evaluate and monitor matches during their match support contact conversations (performed monthly for matches that have been together for under a year and quarterly for matches that have been together for over a year).

OCCY-FUNDED BBBSOK MATCH DEMOGRAPHICS

Bigs - Gender

- Male: 47%
- Female: 53%

Bigs - Age

- 18-25: 32%
- 26-30: 27%
- 31-40: 26%
- 41-50: 10%
- 51-60: 4%
- 61+: 1%

Bigs - Race

- American Indian: 4%
- Asian: 3%
- Black: 11%
- Hispanic: 6%
- White: 72%
- Multi-Race: 4%
- Other: <1%

Littles - Gender

- Male: 47%
- Female: 53%

Littles - Age

- 6-7: 10%
- 10-13: 46%
- 14-18: 34%

Littles - Race

- American Indian: 6%
- Asian: <1%
- Black: 31%
- Hispanic: 7%
- White: 30%
- Multi-Race: 20%
- Other: 6%

Below are survey results for OCCY-funded matches from July 1, 2019 through the release of this report.

ACADEMIC OUTCOMES:

92% say they work hard at school

88% say that doing well in school is important to them

89% think they'll finish high school*

Littles in OCCY-funded matches indicate that they are committed to working hard in school (92% of Littles), they intend on finishing high school (89% of Littles), and that doing well in school is important to them (88% of Littles).

BEHAVIOR OUTCOMES:

87% avoided school detention for at least three months

88% avoided fighting with other kids for at least a month

Littles in OCCY-funded matches said that they avoided being sent to detention (87% of Littles) and avoided pushing, shoving, slapping, hitting, or kicking other kids (88% of Littles) for at least three months. This pertains to time before survey taken, or last three months of school if taken during summer months.

GOAL SETTING OUTCOMES:

78% are able to figure out how to reach their goals*

74% of Bigs say their Littles have made improvements throughout the match

78% set goals and take action to reach them*

Littles in OCCY-funded matches say that when they set goals for themselves, they take action to reach them (78% of Littles) and are able to figure out how to reach their goals (78% of Littles). Bigs in OCCY-funded matches say their Little has made improvements since they started meeting (74% of Bigs).

STRENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP OUTCOMES:

93% feel close to their Big

93% say their relationship with their Big is important to them

89% say their Big helps them solve problems

The outcomes above are a direct result of the strong relationships built between Bigs and Littles. Littles in OCCY-funded matches feel close to their Bigs (93% of Littles), say their relationship with their Big is important to them (93% of Littles), and say that their Big has good ideas about how to solve problems (89% of Littles).

*outcomes only included on the YOS survey, only applicable to Littles 11 years or older





THE IMPACT OF OCCY FUNDING ON BBBSOK

Funding from OCCY allowed BBBSOK staff to recruit dedicated volunteers, fully vet mentors to ensure all child safety standards are met, match these mentors with children with incarcerated parents, and provide monthly match support to all parties in the match to ensure Bigs and Littles build strong relationships, and the Littles achieve positive outcomes.

KIDS SUPPORTED BY OCCY FUNDING

Cleveland County: 9 (24%)
Oklahoma County: 9 (24%)
Osage County: 1 (3%)
Payne County: 4 (11%)
Pottawatomie County: 1 (3%)
Tulsa County: 13 (35%)



MEET REAL OKLAHOMANS

One of the children with incarcerated parents served through BBBSOK's one-to-one mentoring program is Cory. He and his little sister have been living with their grandparents for more than four years, since both their mother and father were incarcerated. That was also when Cory entered the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentorship program.

For more than four years, he has been paired with Big Brother Ben. Together, they enjoy all types of activities, especially playing basketball, bowling and going to restaurants.

Both of Cory's parents were released from prison a few years ago and although they had not previously pursued regaining custody, Cory and his sister might be moving back in with their parents soon. Ben knows Cory longs to be back with his birth family, but after four years together, he is worried about what this major transition might mean for his Little and their relationship.

Happily, Ben is working on building his relationship with Cory's parents because he hopes that once the reunification happens, he will remain a positive influence in Cory's life and a person who will continue to be on Cory's side.

BBBSOK program support staff have talked with Ben about the loss and grief associated with any kind of child welfare case, guardianship or adoption, the complicated emotions that a child might experience during these major life events.

The BBBSOK program specialist and Ben have decided that if the reunification happens, BBBSOK will have a casual breakfast meeting so that everyone can meet in person ... Big Brother Ben, BBBS staff, mom, dad and Little Brother Cory. We know that the transition out of incarceration can be difficult for parents, so we want them to know that Ben is support system for Cory, as well as them, and that the match's continuation is in their son's best interest.

This is still a developing story, but it's one that we are sure will have a happy ending because there are so many people, including a Big Brother, who are in Cory's corner. And in this case, we are in the family's corner, too.

Cory and Ben are real people who live in Oklahoma, though their names have been changed for anonymity. **Similarly, inspiring and life altering stories play out across our state in your local districts every day.**

WE HAVE MORE WORK TO DO

Funding for the Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program has made a positive impact on hundreds of lives in Oklahoma, but the work is not over. Today, there are over 150 children with incarcerated parents on the BBBSOK waiting list, with more children constantly joining the list to be matched with their own mentor. BBBSOK would be able to match every one of those children today if it weren't for two major obstacles – necessary funding and volunteers.

Future OCCY CIP planning and coordination efforts center on fostering community, cultivating networks, and facilitating innovation through public and private partnerships. OCCY efforts also include programs or promising practices that positively affect children and families prior to incarceration (e.g. at arrest), during incarceration, or at release and re-entry.

Today, there are over 150 children with incarcerated parents on the BBBSOK waiting list, with more children constantly joining the list to be matched with their own mentor.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP. PLEASE CONTACT US AT:



Danielle Dill
OCCY Program Manager
Office of Planning &
Coordination
Danielle.Dill@occy.ok.gov
(405) 606-4900



Melissa Ramirez
Chief Executive Officer
Big Brothers Big Sisters
of Oklahoma
melissa.ramirez@bbbsok.org
(918) 579-6402

ⁱ American Academy of Pediatrics. Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Lifelong Consequences of Trauma. (2014) Retrieved from https://www.aap.org/en-us/documents/ttb_aces_consequences.pdf

ⁱⁱ America's Health Rankings United Health Foundation. Adverse Childhood Experiences. Retrieved at: https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/ACEs_8/state/ALL

ⁱⁱⁱ Prison Policy Initiative. States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2018.html>

^{iv} Children who had a parent who was ever incarcerated: KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/9688-children-who-had-a-parent-who-was-ever-incarcerated?loc=38&loct=2#detailed/2/38/false/1648,1603/any/18927,18928>

^v Children in single-parent families in Oklahoma: KIDS COUNT Data Center (n.d.). Retrieved at <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/106-children-in-single-parent-families?loc=38&loct=2#detailed/2/38/false/1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133/any/429,430>

^{vi} "The Science of Resilience." Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/15/03/science-resilience>

^{vii} The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Leveraging the Best Available Evidence. (2019) Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/preventingACES.pdf>